GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:17
ANSWERED ON:24.07.2000
NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMME ON DESERTIFICATION
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Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) Whether the Government propose to formulate a National Action Programme to address issues relating to desertification and drought and chalk out preventive methods for its control;

(b) if so, the salient features of the Programme; and

(c) the time by which the programme is likely to be executed ?

Answer

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (Shri T.R.Baalu)

(a), (b) & (c) Yes, Sir. The Ministry of Environment and Forests have initiated a process for formulating a National Action Programme. A steering committee and working groups have been set up to address various sector-specific and institutional issues, from which will also emerge a time-frame for execution of the programme.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE ON LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION No.17 ON `NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMM DESERTIFICATION`

Introduction

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification has defined `Desertification` as `a process of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities`. Desertification is a phenomenon which is concerning the overall degradation of the land and the land use in the dryland regions (arid, semi-arid and sub-humid). That is, desertification is not confined to desert regions alone, although the process of land dergradation is greatest in the drylands. Desertification is one of the major global environmental problems which has direct impact on the living standard of the inhabitants by way of decreased food output in affected areas. The Convention has laid emphasis on Africa, because of acute problems of famine and malnutrition.

UN Convention to Combat Desertification

The issue of land degradation and desertification was given attention during the UNCED (UN Conference on Environment and Development) 1992 (also known as the Earth Summit) and a resolution adopted in the UNCED in Rio in June 1992, and consequently, an International Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification particularly in Africa was adopted on 17th June 1994. The convention has so far been signed by 164 countries. The Convention came into effect on 26th December 1996 and it came into effect in India on 17th March 1997. The Ministry of Environment and Forests is the nodal ministry for implementation of the Convention.

Major Causes of land degradation

Unsustainable agricultural practices:

- extensive cropping of agricultural area,
- excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides,
- shifting cultivation without allowing adequate period of recovery,

Conversion of prime forest land to non-forest land and agricultural land for other uses,
Saline intrusion due to extraction of ground water, particularly in the coastal belts,
Industrial, mining and other activities without satisfactory measures for land

reclamation, etc.

Conversion of prime agricultural land into urban land.
Global climate changes and the consequence recurrence of drought/ failure of monsoon.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE POLICY

Land being a State subject, there is no national legislation on landuse. A National Land Use Policy outline has been prepared which take into account the environmental, social, demographic, economic, and legal issues.

The National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment and Development (1992) has also addressed the issues of natural resource management and development.

The National Forest Policy 1988 considers that one of the essentials of forest management is increasing forest cover on semi-arid, arid and desert tracts. The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 has emphasied the need to treat forests as an environmental and social resource rather than as a revenue or commercial resource. The Act places strict control on diversion of forest land to other uses.

Participation of NGOs and VAs is an integral part of our policy. Guidelines have been issued by the GOI on June 1, 1990 formalising the process of peoples` participation in forest resource management.

The policy of empowerment of village communities and their involvement in developmental activities including natural resource management has been strengthened through the Constitution (Seventy-Third and Seventy-Fourth)Amendment Act, 1992. This gives land related subjects to the Panchayati Raj institutions (Village, Block and district levels) .

- This is to ensure particpatory planning, decision making, and monitoring of programmes and schemes at the village level.

- Programmes relating to agriculture, land consolidation and soil conservation, water management and watershed development, animal husbandry, fuelwood and fodder, social forestry, etc. are being implemented through these institutions.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The National Land-Use and Wastelands Development Council (NLWC) was set up in 1985 as the highest policy planning and coordinating agency for all issues concerning the country`s land resources. The Prime Minister of India is the chairman of the Council.

The NLWC oversees the work of the National Wastelands Development Board (NWDB), National Land-Use and Conservation Boarc (NLCB) and the National Afforestation and Eco-Development Board (NAEB).

At the State level, the State Land Use Boards (SLUBs) are responsible for implementation of related Central/State schemes anc programmes. The programmes at the village and block level are coordinated by the NLCB at the Centre and State Land Use Boards (SLUBs) in the States.

Thrust Areas of Major Programmes and Schemes Under Implementation for Addressing Land Degradation

Soil conservation in catchment area of flood prone rivers.
Integrated watershed management.
Soil and land use surveys.
Development and stabilisation of ravines.
Control of shifting cultivation.
Dryland management.
Drought prone areas programme.
Desert development programme.
Special programmes for production of food grains, oil seeds,.
Reclamation of mined areas, saline and alkaline areas, water logged areas.
Joint forest management.
Social forestry.

Major Central Sector/Centrally Sponsored Schemes for addressing land degradation/ desertification:

Ministry of Environment and Forests

Integrated Afforestation and Eco-development Projects Scheme(IAEPS)	To promote afforestation and development of degraded forests by adopting an integrated approach to the

development of land and other related natural resources on watershed basis, through the micro-planning process.

Area Oriented Fuelwood and Fodder Projects Scheme (AOFFPS) — To augment the production of fuelwood and fodder in 229 identified fuelwood districts in the country.

Conservation and Development of Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) including medicinal plants — Special focus on tribal population for whom NTFP is the main source of livelihood.

Grants-in Aid scheme — Promoting peoples` participation- funds provided to NGOs and Voluntary Agencies (VA) for afforestation and tree planting activities.

Eco-Task Forces — Afforestation, pasture development, soil and water conservation and other restorative work carried out by 4 eco-task forces in selected locations. These forces comprise ex-servicemen and serving JCOs and officers.

Association of Scheduled Tribes and Rural Poor in Regeneration of Degraded Forest on Usufruct Sharing Basis — For rehabilitation of degraded forests in tribal dominant areas also aims at wage providing employment and usufructs to the tribal people.

Ministry of Rural Development

Implementation of programmes for rural development including wastelands development.

Desert Development Programme (DDP) — Restore degraded areas due to soil erosion, water and moisture stress with low productivity and inadequate vegetative cover.

Drought Prone Area Programme — To restore ecosystems of desert areas (947 blocks of 164 districts in 13 States) affected by extreme climatic conditions (temp., poor rainfall, low humidity and high wing velocity) combined with recurrent drought. Implemented on a watershed basis with the involvement of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Integrated Wastelands Development Project Scheme — Integrated wastelands development based on village/micro-watershed plans, with peoples` participation.

Support to NGOs/VAs (Grants-in-Aid) — For registered VAs to take up small programmes like plantation, soil and moisture conservation,etc.

Ministry of Agriculture

National Watershed Development Project	Aims at conservation of rainwater for holistic Rainfed Areas and for integrated development of potential watersheds and promotion of farming system approach, management of common property resources, augmenting family income and nutritional levels through household production systems.
Integrated Watershed Development Project	Designed to address the integrated development (Hills) of hilly areas especially of the ecologically degraded Shivalik, Karewas ranges in Haryana, HP, J&K and Punjab.
Integrated Watershed Development Project (Plains)	For minimising ecological degradation by promoting sustainable and replicable rain-water conservation measures and diversified production system.
Soil Conservation in the Catchments of River Valley Projects	Aims at enhancing the productivity of degraded lands, improvement of land capability, prevention of soil erosion from the catchments/watersheds and ultimately increasing the lives of reservoirs, in priority watersheds.
Soil Conservation in the Catchments of Flood Prone Rivers	Aims at reducing peak rate of runoff by increasing in-situ conservation of water and groundwater recharge by increasing the time of concentration resulting in reduction of flood hazards.
Reclamation of Alkali soils	Aims at improving physical conditions and productivity status of alkali soils for restoring optimum crop production.

In addition to the above-mentioned programmes, the Ministries of Human ResourceDevelopment (Department of Education, Department of Women and Child Development), Health(Public Heath, Voluntary Health Organisation),Social Welfare (development of backward classes, areas), Non-Conventional Energy Sources (Adoption of low-cost and alternatetechnologies), etc. are also implementing programmes and schemes which are relevant in the context of community development/upliftment and rehabilitation in the dryland regions of the country.

Preparation of the National Action Programme (NAP)

Under the Convention, the affected member countries are obliged to prepare a National Action Programme (NAP) for combating desrtification and drought. The NAP is to utilise and build to the extent possible, existing relevant action programmes, as central element of the strategy to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought.

Follwing steps have been taken for the preparation of the National Action Programme:

(1) Constitution of a National Steering Committee to oversee the formulation and implementation of the NAP:

This exercise was begun in 1999, with the constitution of an Inter-sectoral National Steering Committee (NSC) under the Chairmanship of Special Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF), which is the National Focal Point (NFP) for a UNCCD activities.

(2) Constitution of Working Groups under the NSC on the TORs (as above) Four Working Groups (WGs) were constituted under the

National Steering Committee (NSC) to prepare the NAP on broad areas such as:

(i) Desertification Monitoring and Assessment and Early Warning Systems.

(ii) Strategies for sustainable landuse management.

(iii) Local Area Development Programmes.

(iv) Policy and Institutional Framework.

Working Groups 1, 2 and 3 have submitted their reports.

(3) Preparation of a National Report:A National Report also requires to be submitted by all affected member country Parties under the Convention. The Ministry of Environment and Forests engaged a consultant, for prepration of a National Report on Combating Desertification. This report has been submitted to the CCD Secretariat in June 2000, after incorporation of modifications suggested by Working Groups for discussion during COP-4.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. No. 1 What measures are taken for drought mitigation and relief?

Ans: When situations of drought occur in different States, the Central and State governments undertake relief measures by providing drinking water, foodgrains through Public Distribution System (PDS), fodder, food subsidies to special groups and employment through food-for-work programme. At the Centre, The Disaster Management Division in the ministry of Agriculture coordinates drought relief works with State governments. The National Centre for Disaster Management set up in 1995 undertakes human resource development, research studies, building of database and provides information services, and documentation on disaster management. Financial assistance to State governments is provided from the Calamity Relief Fund (CRF). In the wake of the recent drought, the GOI has set up a Commission on Disaster Management under the chairmanship of Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission to look into the entire gamut of the problem and make recommendations to for its prevention and mitigation.

Q.No.2 What are the preventive measures that can be taken up to avoid such disasters?

Ans: The most effective method is of regeneration of degraded watersheds. A number of State Governments are involved in implementation of schemes for integrated watershed programmes. A network of forestry and agricultural research institutions are conducting research on problems related to rehabilitation of degraded lands and increasing productivity of forests of dryland. Besides developing technology packages, these institutions are also engaged in training field staff in various issue relating to eco-regeneration. Major part of our country is rainfed and therefore, measures for surface water harvesting and rainwater harvesting require to be taken up by local Governments.

Q.No.3 What are the major programmes under implementation for prevention and control of desertification and drought in the country ?

Ans: A number of Central/Centrally sponsored schemes are under implementation by various Ministries of the GOI using the watershed approach. The most important of these are with the Ministry of Environment and Forests which looks after regeneration of forest land, the Ministry of Rural Development, which implements programmes for rural development including wastelands development and the programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture which are aimed at integrated development of watersheds and promotion of farming systems on a sustainable basis.. The GOI is also implementing a number of schemes for employment generation and on alternate livelihood to lessen the pressure on the natural resources.

Q.No.4 What would be the major elements of the National Action Programme ?

Ans: In order to implement the objectives of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in the country, an inter-sectoral National Steering Committee, under the Chairmanship of the Special Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF), has beer constituted. The National Action Programme (NAP), shall keep in view the objectives of United

Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) for sustainable development and conservation and protection of environment in the framework of Agenda 21, as the central element of the strategy to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. The NAP shall utilise and build to the extent possible on existing relevant action programmes. The NAP shall involve long-term integrated strategies that focus simultaneously in affected areas, on improved productivity of land, conservation and sustainable management of land and water resources leading to improved living conditions, in particular at the community level. Thus, the NAP shall address issues such as environmental conservation, agricultural productivity, sustainable energy and fodder production and use, developmental activities for local communities and their rehabilitation in degraded lands to improve their living standards.